

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000456

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS
DEPARTMENT PLEASE ALSO PASS TOPEC
NSC FOR E. MILLARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03-15-14

TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR PTER CE NO LTTE

SUBJECT: Norwegian Special Envoy Solheim reviews latest
on LTTE split and discusses upcoming election

Refs: (A) Colombo 446, and previous

- (B) Oslo 419

(U) Classified by Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead.
Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a March 13 meeting with the four local co-chairs (Japan, Norway, U.S. and the EU) and again to a wider donor group on March 15, Norwegian Special Envoy Erik Solheim discussed his latest visit to Sri Lanka. Ambassador Lunstead participated in the meetings. Most of Solheim's comments focused on the recent split in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) organization and Sri Lanka's April 2 parliamentary election. Solheim's visit appears to have been mainly devoted to fact gathering on the new complexities and uncertainties affecting the Sri Lankan situation. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) MEETING WITH LTTE OFFICIALS: In March 13 and March 15 meetings, which were attended by Ambassador Lunstead, Solheim said he had met with S.P. Thamilchelvam, the Tiger political chief, during a March 11 trip to LTTE headquarters in the Vanni region. During the discussion, which centered around rebel eastern commander Karuna's recent break with the main LTTE leadership (see Ref A), Solheim said Thamilchelvam had emphasized repeatedly that the group wanted to "peacefully" resolve the dispute with Karuna. Asserting that Karuna was operating alone and that most eastern cadre were "against" him, Thamilchelvam told Solheim that the Tigers would try to undermine Karuna from within by starving Karuna financially and encouraging defections from his ranks. Thamilchelvam also blamed Karuna for the two recent election-related assassinations in the east (see Ref A). (Karuna has placed blame for these killings on the LTTE's intelligence apparatus.) The Tigers also told Solheim of their concern that no one interfere in the Karuna situation. The group was steadfast that it was an "internal matter" for the LTTE alone. (Separately, during two meetings, Solheim said PM Wickremesinghe made clear that the GSL would not get involved in the situation between the LTTE and Karuna. The PM also said that the government would avoid taking advantage of the situation.)

¶3. (C) While in the Vanni, Solheim also said that he had met with Pathuman, a high-ranking LTTE commander from Trincomalee District. According to Solheim, Pathuman looked "okay" and stated that he (Pathuman) was still in command of the Trincomalee district. (Solheim's meeting with Pathuman effectively rebutted recent press reports that the LTTE had "executed" Pathuman because he was allegedly close to Karuna -- see Ref A.)

¶4. (C) In a March 11 visit to the eastern area of Trincomalee, Solheim said that he had had a positive meeting with Sri Lanka Army Major General Sunil Tennekoon, the general in charge (GOC) of the district. Tennekoon stated that the situation in Trincomalee remained calm, despite newspaper reports to the contrary. Local Tigers officials in Trincomalee, for their part, told Solheim they were happy that the Norwegian delegation was visiting Trincomalee. According to the Tigers, the visit was an important signal that the international community remained engaged in Sri Lanka. Separately, Solheim added that the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) was continuing its work in the east, despite press reports to the contrary. The only change was that the SLMM was not entering the eastern areas held by Karuna.

¶5. (C) Solheim told the co-chairs that the Norwegians saw three possible outcomes to the Karuna situation:
-- (1) the LTTE leadership undermines or kills Karuna;

-- (2) the LTTE leadership strikes a deal with Karuna, giving the rebel commander autonomy over the eastern districts of Batticaloa and Ampara;
-- (3) Karuna becomes a GSL-supported "warlord." (Solheim said this last possibility would be the most unsettling for the peace process if it came to fruition.)

16. (C) Solheim said Thamilchelvam also had discussed donor assistance and the need to resolve the issue of an assistance funds delivery mechanism. To the co-chairs, Solheim stated that the Norwegians were considering a model similar to the Afghan Fund.

17. (C) PARLIAMENTARY CAMPAIGN: In discussing the April 2 parliamentary elections, Solheim noted that the LTTE hoped the government would approve polling sites either at the GSL's crossing points into Tiger-controlled area, or in the "no-man's land" between GSL- and LTTE-controlled areas. On this point, it was not clear which alternative had been agreed to, although the LTTE remains concerned that the Army will not honor election plans and, in a repeat of the December 2001 parliamentary elections, would largely bar Tamils in Tiger-controlled areas from reaching polling sites. If polling sites were approved for either of these areas, the LTTE expected that the Army would not be present, with the Sri Lanka police instead providing security. According to Solheim, Army officials in Jaffna and Trincomalee had stated that the Tigers had agreed to polling sites at the GSL's crossing points. (Mission has heard reports that the Sri Lankan Election Commissioner will support holding the polling in "no-man's land" areas.)

18. (C) COMMENT: Solheim's visit appears to have been mainly devoted to fact gathering. Karuna's decision to separate himself from the main LTTE organization has clearly made the overall situation that much more complex. Moreover, there is great uncertainty over how the Karuna matter will play out and over the upcoming election. That said, the Norwegians still appear firmly engaged, which is a significant positive. Their mettle is clearly being tested in this confusing, volatile period, however. END SUMMARY.

19. (U) Minimize considered.

LUNSTEAD